

~~A B,~~ a mobile element movable along said guide path; and

~~a wafer exchange element provided on said mobile element, and capable of removing one or more processed wafers from said insertion portion of one said wafer processing apparatuses, of holding and transporting said one or more wafers, and transferring said one or more wafers to said insertion portion of another wafer processing apparatus.~~

(2) Please replace claim 3 with the following new claim 3 (APPENDIX 2):

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3. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 1, wherein said guide path comprises a first magnetic field generating element for generating a magnetic field; and said mobile element comprises a second magnetic field generating element for generating a magnetic field, forming a linear motor in conjunction with said first magnetic field generating element, and conferring a propulsive force to said mobile element.

(3) Please replace claim 4 with the following new claim 4 (APPENDIX 3):

4. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 2, further comprising a power supply element provided along said guide path; wherein an electric power is supplied to said mobile element by means of said power supply element.

(4) Please replace claim 5 with the following new claim 5 (APPENDIX 4):

5. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 4, wherein said power supply element comprises a lain electric cable or electric coil provided along said guide path, and an electricity receiving element provided on said mobile element for receiving the electric power supplied to said electric cable or electric coil without contact, whereby electric power is supplied to said mobile element without contact.

[(5) Please replace claim 7 with the following new claim 7 (APPENDIX 5):]

A3
7. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 6, wherein said control element supplies electrical signals containing control data to the electric cable or electric coil provided along said guide path; and said communication element receives the electrical signals containing control data supplied to said electric cable or electric coil by means of said control element.

[(6) Please replace claim 8 with the following new claim 8 (APPENDIX 6):]

8. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 6, wherein said communication element is an optical communication element, a radio communication element or a cable communication element provided alongside of said guide path.

[(7) Please replace claim 10 with the following new claim 10 (APPENDIX 7):]

A4
10. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 6, further comprising a position detecting element for detecting a position of said mobile element moving along said guide path; and said control element generates control data based on detection results of said position detecting element and wafer conveyance requests from said wafer processing apparatus.

[(8) Please replace claim 11 with the following new claim 11 (APPENDIX 8):]

11. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 6, further comprising position detecting element for detecting a position of said mobile element moving along said guide path; and said mobile element control unit controls the operations of said mobile element based on detection results of said position detecting element and control the data supplied from said control element through said communication element.

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(9) Please replace claim 12 with the following new claim 12 (APPENDIX 9):

12. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 10, wherein said position detecting element comprises a plurality of mobile element detecting sensors placed along said guide path, and said mobile element detecting sensors are placed at regular distance intervals throughout the guide path or placed at narrower intervals near the wafer processing apparatuses than along midways between adjacent two wafer processing apparatuses

(10) Please replace claim 13 with the following new claim 13 (APPENDIX 10):

13. (once amended) A conveyance system in accordance with claim 1, further comprising a space forming element for forming a closed space such as to enclose said guide path inside which said mobile element moves along said guide path; wherein the degree of air purity inside said closed space formed by said space forming means is higher than the degree of purity outside said space.

(11) Please add the following new claim 20:

AS
--20. A conveyance system according to claim 1, wherein a plurality of wafers is held by said insertion portion of said wafer processing apparatus at a time.--

(12) Please add the following new claim 21:

--21. A conveyance system according to claim 1, wherein only a single wafer is held by said insertion portion of said wafer processing apparatus at a time.--

(13) Please add the following new claim 22:

AS
--22. A conveyance system according to claim 1, wherein a plurality of wafers is held by said wafer exchange element at a time.--

(14) Please add the following new claim 23:

--23. A conveyance system according to claim 1, wherein only a single wafer is held by said wafer exchange element at a time.--

(15) Please add the following new claim 24:

--24. A conveyance system according to claim 1, wherein a plurality of wafers is transferred to said insertion portion and retrieved from said portion at a time.--

(16) Please add the following new claim 25:

--25. A conveyance system according to claim 1, wherein only a single wafer is transferred to said insertion portion and retrieved from said portion at a time.- -

REMARKS:

The present invention finds its application in a wafer processing line. The processing line includes a number of processing stations for performing different wafer processing operations, with wafers to be processed being transported from one processing station to another along the line. In the related art, wafers are transported within cassettes in batches of a predetermined number, and are stored in a stocker between processing stations until each wafer in the batch has been processed. This transport method is effective for handling wafers in volume of the same type, but suffers from a problem. Namely, wafers stored in a stocker between processing stations are vulnerable to contamination; and the longer the storage time between processing stations, the greater the risk of contamination.